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Social study and training at the universities

London

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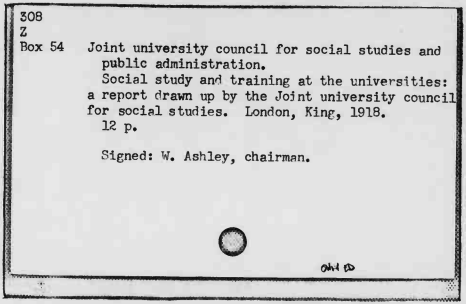
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Social Study and Training at the Universities

A REPORT

DRAWN UP BY

The Joint University Council for Social Studies

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Social Study and Training at the Universities

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THE REPORT

1. The following Report has been drawn up by the Joint University Council for Social Studies, which owed its origin in a large measure to a Conference called together by the Home Office in July 1917, to consider the Training of Welfare Supervisors. This Council was formally constituted in April 1918, with the object of co-ordinating and developing the work of Social Study Departments in connexion with the Universities of Great Britain and Ireland. The Membership of the Council is given on the preceding page.

The purpose of the following Report is twofold. It is to describe a significant recent development in teaching within British Universities; and it is to press this development upon the attention of Government Departments, of Municipalities, of voluntary associations, and of all citizens interested in social well-being.

2. The movement has come to be generally known in University circles as "Social Study." Like all terms for University instruction, this particular term is gradually acquiring a definite meaning from the actual subjects which are being taught in existing "Social Study" courses at the present time. Social Study, in the wide and etymological sense of the term, has, of course, been pursued in the Universities for generations, as a part or an aspect of Philosophy, Law, and History; and still more obviously in the shape of Economics. The side of social activity which is concerned with the form and functions of the State and its organs has more recently been studied at Universities in systematized courses usually called Political Science and Public Administration. But "Social Study," as the term is now coming to be used, differs from all these in spirit, in method, and in purpose. In spirit, because it is distinctly

and continuously conscious of the close interconnexion of all the several sides of human life in society. In method, because the formal instruction is closely associated with "practical work," by which is meant the acquiring of a first-hand knowledge of existing social conditions and of personal experience in the working of social institutions. In purpose, because it invites students who have a definite intention to devote themselves to what—with equal indefiniteness, but equal intelligibility—is known as "social work," whether as paid officials of public bodies or organizations, as members of local authorities, or as public-spirited citizens, and who in their future work will be brought into personal touch with people of different classes and with the varied civic agencies of a modern town.

3. By a Social Study Course is usually meant a course of study under the direct control of, or in close connexion with, a University, and containing the following main features:

(*a*) The course lasts for at least one academic year and occupies the full working time of the student during that year. Some of the courses cannot be taken under two years; while all the courses are so planned that students without any previous special qualifications and experience can take two years.

(*b*) The course consists partly of attendance at lectures and tutorial classes and partly of practical work and visits of observation, about half the time being usually devoted to lectures and study, and half to visits of observation and to actual participation in practical work.

(*c*) The aim of the course is to give the student a general introduction to the whole field of Social Effort and to provide a definite preparation both for professional and voluntary Social Work.

(*d*) The course is open to non-matriculated as well as matriculated students. A large number of the students have already had a considerable experience of practical Social Work, while an increasing number of students have already taken a University Degree or its equivalent before beginning the Social Study Course.

(*e*) At the end of the course a Certificate or Diploma or equivalent recognition is usually given, as a rule by the University itself. Such a Certificate or Diploma is conditional both upon the student having obtained a reasonable standard of proficiency in the examination which is based upon the lectures, and usually undertaken by external as well as internal examiners, and also upon a satisfactory report being received from those who have been actually in charge of the practical work of the students. Sometimes an oral examination is added in reference to the practical work, conducted by the Committee in charge of the course, usually consisting both of members of the University staff and of persons experienced in practical work.

4. Such full-time University Social Study Courses, extending at least over a complete year, are already in existence at the University of London (School of Economics, Bedford College, and King's College for Women) and in the Social Study Schools connected, officially or unofficially, with the Universities of Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, and Liverpool. Similar courses are in contemplation at the Universities of Manchester, Armstrong College (Newcastle), Sheffield, and the University of Wales.

5. In confining ourselves in this Report to University courses for adult students prepared to give their whole time to study and training, we are not unaware of other movements in the same general direction. There are, for instance, a very considerable number of lecture and class courses arranged by various associations, all aiming at an increase of knowledge of, and interest in, social facts. It is clear that those are of great assistance in the training of citizens; but, as at present organized, they provide only a limited part of Social Education in the full sense of the words. They are usually limited in scope; they seldom deal with more than a single aspect of a very complex subject, and that only theoretically; and there is always a danger that isolated courses of this kind may produce a one-sided impression on the students. It is perhaps not too much to hope that such courses may in the future be brought into relation with a fuller and more complete study of social facts.

Then again, in recent years there has been a marked tendency on the part of philanthropic associations to arrange special courses of training, intended as a preparation for the particular work with which they are concerned, such as the care of the feeble-minded, the management of clubs for boys and girls, and so on. This tendency is in itself an indication of the growing demand for Social Education; but such courses of special instruction can evidently not take the place of the general education of social workers. They fall into place rather as valuable additions to it, on a par with other specialized courses which may be introduced towards the end of a general course for the benefit of students who desire to devote themselves to particular forms of social effort.

6. We have purposely excluded from this Report any reference to the part which the University Departments of Social Studies may play in the future in the provision of "part-time" courses for men and women who are already engaged in social and administrative work, and who are thereby excluded from giving up a year to a Social Study Course, but who desire to enlarge their present equipment of knowledge and social experience. Developments on these lines have already been made in London. We recognize the importance of this movement, but are of opinion that it should more fittingly be dealt with in a separate Report.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding we desire to make it clear at the outset that we do not regard the course of training for a Social Study Diploma or Certificate as by itself a sufficient preparation for those who desire to enter the higher branches of the public service. For such persons we regard it as essential that they should go through a full University course, though we hold that certain of them might with advantage devote a further year to Social Study and training. The courses mentioned in this Report are designed either for post-graduate students or for men and women whose future work will bring them into close personal touch with people of different classes, but for whom a full University course is either not practicable or, in some cases, not desirable.

7. There is to-day a substantial body of opinion, among those qualified to judge, to the effect that the University should form the centre of Social Study for adult students. The advantages of this are threefold. In the first place, every University already contains some provision in the way of teachers and courses of lectures which can be utilized to meet the requirements of some of the subjects necessary for a full course of Social Study; and the assistance of the existing academic staffs is helpful in maintaining a high standard of teaching in the different subjects. In the second place, the students themselves gain enormously by becoming a part of the University, sharing in the corporate life of the University students, and obtaining a wider outlook in consequence. In the third place, control by a University body enables different and sometimes widely divergent points of view to be represented in the teaching and class work and at the same time provides a safeguard against the possible danger that the teaching may fall into the hands of a particular party or school of thought. A further safeguard is provided where, as is the case at certain Universities, an Advisory Committee is attached to the Department on which there sit representatives of Employers' Associations, of Trade Unions, and of the various Social Agencies in the town. It may probably be assumed, therefore, that the general scheme of Social Education, so far as formal instruction is concerned, will and should consist in University courses closely connected with the whole work of the University.* But one all-important proviso must be insisted upon.

8. Courses of instruction may be altogether admirable in themselves and yet not suitable to make up any very substantial part of the systematic scheme of Social Study

* The views expressed above are not fully accepted by the Glasgow representatives, who hold that schools of Social Study established for training candidates for posts not requiring full university training should be less under the control of the University than this Report would imply. While agreeing that the lectures should be given by University teachers, they prefer that the Certificate should be given by an *ad hoc* body on which other institutions are also represented.

we have in view. Because Social Study must include historical, legal, philosophical, economic, and even physiological elements, it does not necessarily follow that a suitable Social Study curriculum can be put together from the courses in history, economics, and the rest previously existing in any particular University. The extent to which this may be possible will depend upon their character and method. Some Universities may already provide courses which, while not originally created for the purpose of Social Study in the narrower sense, may fittingly, with little or no adaptation to the new need, form an element in the new department. In others, even courses which, so far as their titles and description in the syllabus are concerned, seem to be available constituents of Social Study, may in fact, from the nature of their methods or intellectual objects, be quite unsuitable. Social Study, as it is now conceived, requires that each of the subjects of instruction shall be treated with continual reference to actual social life and its difficulties. For the whole aim in Social Study is to educate the citizen's understanding of the social life of which he is a part; to train and test his judgment in dealing with its complexities—for the good of his neighbours as of himself; to furnish him with a background of fact and ideal which shall throw light on all his practice as an administrator; to increase his power of dealing with people and their present difficulties; and to inspire him with faith in the value of his efforts.

9. Who the teachers—both men and women—are to be by whom these ideals are to be converted into living realities in the instruction furnished by the University will depend upon local conditions in each case. Some holders of long-established Chairs will have the social point of view, the social experience, the constant habit of viewing their subject in its relaton to the concrete facts of life, which will make them quite able and very willing to take a sympathetic part in the new movement. Other teachers will probably be drawn from among men and women who have been actively engaged, as their chief occupation, in actual Social Work, and who can bring together the lessons of their experience in systematic form. The personal guidance in that practical work which will most usefully go side by side with the formal instruction, will in most cases be best furnished by persons who are primarily social "practitioners." if the word may be permitted, and not primarily academic. But whoever the teacher may be, whether in the formal instruction or in the practical work, we regard it as of the utmost importance that there should be the closest possible intercourse between the student and the tutor, so that the student may be able to talk over with the tutor his own particular problems and difficulties.

10. The following subjects are those normally taught and regarded as covering the field of the general formal instruction (as distinguished from the lessons derivable from the concurrent practical training and the visits of observation provided in connexion with schools of Social Study):

(*a*) An historical account of the origin of existing social and economic conditions, with particular stress on the more recent stages of their evolution.

(*b*) A description of present-day social and economic life.

(*c*) The analysis of economic facts, together with an introduction to methods of investigation.

(*d*) The discussion of the principles and methods of social administration, including industrial law, the functions and organs of local government, and the working of voluntary agencies.

(*e*) A philosophical statement and examination of social principles, aims, and ideals.

The name to be given to this last-mentioned subject (whether it be called Social Philosophy, Social Theory, or Social Psychology) matters little, provided that it is clear that the intention is to make the student alive to what is involved in the assumptions lying behind social practice and the efforts at reform and improvement.

In addition to these general subjects of study almost all Universities provide special courses of lectures, dealing with the actual working of existing institutions and agencies such as, e.g. Employment Exchanges, Hospitals, Children's Courts, etc., given, as a rule, by men and women engaged in the actual working of such institutions and agencies. Such courses are often closely linked up with actual visits of observation.

11. The Practical Work naturally presents different features in accordance with the locality in which it is carried on. The opportunities in London differ greatly from those in, for instance, Liverpool and Edinburgh. Speaking broadly, however, in all Universities such work falls under two main heads: Visits of Observation and Practical Work proper.

Visits of Observation are designed to give the students more than a text-book acquaintance with such agencies in social life as Municipal Government, the Administration of Justice, the Conditions of Factory Life and of School Life, the Administration of the Poor Law, Health Work such as Hospitals, the Operation of the Insurance Acts, and Employment Problems through the working of Employment Exchanges and Unemployment Insurance.

The Practical Work aims, in the first place, at giving the student, in those cases where he has been brought up in a different environment, an acquaintance with normal working-class life. This object can only be achieved by the active co-operation of working men and women and by the opportunities afforded by them for the student to be present at meetings and discussions of such bodies as the Workers' Educational Association, Adult Schools, and the Women's Co-operative Guild. It includes, in the second place, a training in administration in connexion with the various Social Agencies of a town, so that the student may gain, not only a practical experience of office work, committee work, and routine, but also a first-hand acquaintance with problems of relief, of sickness, and unemployment.

We lay the greatest stress upon the student being enabled to gain, under the guidance of an experienced person, a living realization and insight into the various civic and social agencies of a modern town and to understand the way in which the work of all social agencies act and re-act upon one another. In all branches of social work, one of the great dangers is that the work is so absorbing and so exacting that the social worker fails to realize its connexion with other branches of civic and social work. This general introduction into the field of social effort, and this first-hand acquaintance with the varied forms of social activity which any large town presents, is as valuable for the future Health Worker or Welfare Supervisor as it is for the Employment Exchange Manager, the Continuation School Teacher, or the Factory Inspector.

12. With regard to the lectures and class work, and also with regard to the practical work, there is necessarily a great divergence of opinion and practice in regard to the treatment of the several subjects and to the emphasis laid upon them respectively. This divergence follows inevitably from the difference, in composition and personality, of the teaching staffs available in the different centres; and it is not only inevitable, but, up to a point, entirely advantageous, since the personality and dominant interests of the teacher are so much more important than the contents of his syllabus. Moreover, the subjects themselves are not only very general, but also very difficult to define. There is no accepted definition of social economics or of social philosophy: perhaps there never will be. All that can be asked is that each teacher should include those matters which he himself has found to be vital to a full appreciation of the difficulties and the possibilities of social progress, and should teach his subjects with the aim of helping students to be thoughtful, intelligent, and hopeful in their dealing with social difficulties. Any standardization of syllabuses, any strict definition of the scope of the course, would be a disaster and would destroy the vitality of the teaching.

13. We desire to emphasize the fact that the education aimed at is of a general rather than of a special nature. From a purely practical point of view the necessity of this is obvious. The students who commence such a course of study have in many cases not made up their minds as to what branch of Social or Administrative Work they desire to take up in the future, and in many cases their choice is necessarily determined by the particular kind of post which is offered to them at the end of their course. Further, the variety of possible openings is so great as to render specialization

an impossibility. Among the students who have taken such courses of study are to be found members of Boards of Guardians, of Town Councils, Welfare Supervisors, Secretaries of Juvenile Advisory Committees, of Care Committees, and of Girls' and Boys' Clubs, Trade Union secretaries, and officials of Friendly Societies. But apart from such practical considerations, we are convinced that what the students need most is a general mental discipline combined with such a general introduction as will serve to link up their future more specialized work with the whole field of Social Effort, and give them some realization of the place of their particular task in industrial and social life in general.

At the same time, we realize that some specialization is both desirable and necessary in the case of students who are definitely preparing for a particular type of work, and such specialization is usually best given in the last few months of the course. This, however, raises the problem of the proper length of the course, to which allusion is made in paragraph 15.

14. An important matter remains for consideration in connexion with the scope of the general instruction. There is a wide and growing body of opinion which, while admitting the necessity of the subjects hitherto dealt with, insists that they represent only part of the equipment needed by the competent social worker. The social worker, it is urged, is being taught to consider the facts of social life without first grasping the facts of physical life; and is being encouraged to deal with social reform without adequate reference to the physical health of the community. In other words, it is claimed that the subjects of physiology and hygiene should be made an integral part of the general curriculum for all social students. The claim rests on two grounds: first, that a rapidly increasing number of social workers (such as Health Visitors and Welfare Workers, to specify only two groups) are engaged in work which demands considerable knowledge of these subjects; secondly, that every competent social worker—and every intelligent citizen—needs nowadays a far fuller knowledge than before of the laws of life and health. The former claim has until recently been met only in part, by providing some or all the students in particular Universities with short courses in Hygiene, though in the academic year now ending this has in some cases been supplemented by instruction in Personal Health. The latter claim has not yet been met at all, nor even fully considered. It is quite possible that those most interested in Social Education have belonged too exclusively to the school of thought which consider social well-being in relation to moral and economic health rather than to physical health. It is quite possible that a one-sidedness has resulted which needs to be corrected. In any case, the claim of the Hygienist is too reasonable a one to be refused serious consideration on any ground except that of the sheer impossibility of finding room in the course for the suggested subjects.

15. This, however, raises the whole question of the length of the course. At present, the normal course extends over one year; but this represents, not the time available for study, but the time available for study and practical work combined. It is usual to allot half the time of the students to the latter; and no one questions the necessity for much practical work (at any rate for the inexperienced students). But most teachers and many students are already conscious that the time available for study is much too short, and that the difficulties in the way of fitting in an adequate amount of practical work and observation are very great. It is, however, already becoming common for younger students to devote two years instead of one to the ordinary certificate course at a University; and modifications in its requirements are frequently made with a view to lessening the difficulty of combining study and practice at one and the same time, as, for instance, by recommending practical work during the long vacation preceding the year of study. Clearly, therefore, we are here very far from any finality. Indeed, the case in favour of a lengthening of the normal course from one to two years (for the ordinary students at least) is exceedingly strong. Such an extension of the course in the case of the average student to two years would have a double advantage. In the first place, it would be possible to devote to the subjects of Physiology and Hygiene that extra care and attention which we have seen to be

desirable, and in the second place it would make it possible to provide a really satisfactory general education with full opportunities for specialization during the second year, and with the introduction of practical training in such a way as not to confuse or overload the student.

16. So far we have been considering the education and practical training of what we have called the average student, by which we mean the person who has taken up a Social Training course with no previous education of a University type and little or no previous experience in practical Social Work. We must, however, take into consideration two classes of students in whose case what we have said above will not apply.

In the first place, a number of persons of mature age take up the social courses who have already had a wide experience of practical Social Work. In many cases they have worked for years in some branch of Social Work and wish to acquire that background of Social Theory which will enable them to bring into order and perspective a mass of separate facts with which they have previously been confronted. Such people require little or no further practical work, and experience has shown that a course lasting for one year devoted almost entirely to reading, thinking, and lectures is sufficient to give them the further training they require.

In the second place, a growing number of persons who have already graduated are beginning to take up these social courses. Many of them have already taken a degree or its equivalent at Oxford or Cambridge and come for a further year to one of the local Universities. If their degree courses have included any considerable part of the field of Social Study, it is proper to exempt them from equivalent portions of a Social Study Curriculum; provided—and on this condition we lay stress—that the previous work has in itself been of a suitable character. Where the previous degree courses have been remote from Social Study, they have often been the instruments of a general mental training such as has enabled graduates to benefit more quickly by their new social studies.

17. But it should be added that it is quite possible that a large part of what is included in Social Study may in future be made the subject-matter of graduating departments—Honour Schools, Triposes, and the like, in University Faculties already existing or to be created. There are tendencies visible in certain Universities in this direction, by the modification of existing graduating departments or by the creation of new ones. Such new degree courses, though not wholly confined to lectures, reading, and class work, would not cover the practical work which forms so integral a part of the existing Social Study courses. Such a development, so far from being an obstacle, would greatly strengthen the movement with which this Report is concerned. By omitting certain of the lectures, it would be possible for such graduates during one academic year after their graduation to reap the fullest benefit both from the formal instruction and from the practical work provided in the existing Social Study courses together with such specialized instruction as may be needed. We welcome such a development, and what we say below as to the recognition of Social Study Certificates applies *a fortiori* to such graduates; though we recognize that for some time to come the larger body of social students will not be of this class.

18. We venture to think that the movement within the Universities of the country which we have thus outlined is one which ought to attract the attention of all those who can exercise any influence upon the staffing of the public service. In the years before the war there had been a rapid and remarkable growth of public departments concerned with social well-being. We need only refer to such new departments as the Employment Exchanges and the Trade Boards' Sickness and Unemployment Insurance, and Old Age Pensions; and to the developments in the work of Educational Authorities involved in the Medical Care and Industrial After Care of Children. After the war the tasks thus undertaken will need to be discharged on an even larger scale. It is sufficient to point to the many large and pressing problems which are suggested by the very mention of Industrial Reconstruction, of Public Health, and of Continuation Schools. We believe that the time has come when the whole subject of the staffing of

these services, both national and municipal, should be considered afresh. Mere examination in the conventional subjects will not suffice to ensure reasonable competency, intelligence, and interest on the part of those appointed. Appointment without examination or some equivalent test opens the door to corruption and jobbery. We do not argue that Social Study Certificates given by Universities should of themselves be regarded as a sufficient qualification for any appointment, though it would seem eminently reasonable to treat them as preliminary evidence, for what they are worth, of suitability for the duties involved. But we do hold that the several authorities might well take cognisance of the Social Study movement; and that they should frame their requirements of admission into the public service in such a way as to secure for the country such benefits as the Social Study movement would seem capable of rendering.

Signed on behalf of the Council,

W. ASHLEY, *Chairman.*

J. ST. G. HEATH, *Hon. Sec.*

July 1918

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